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Justice targets are just a wish list

Reducing adult incarceration by at least 15 per cent by 2031, is setting our sights too low according to the Law Council of Australia, and needs more committed and ambitious action from government, says the Law Council President, Pauline Wright.

“This target of 15 per cent by 2031, does not envisage achieving parity until 2093,” Ms Wright said.

“That is several generations away and is especially disappointing as it comes following the inaction displayed by the Attorneys-Generals from across Australia, in deferring a decision on raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.”

While it is known that better justice outcomes are inextricably linked to action on social issues such as housing, disability, education and out-of-home care, and people with disability are strikingly over-represented in the criminal justice system, all targets remain merely aspirational if they are not accompanied by adequate funding.

“Lack of appropriate bail accommodation leads to many people being held behind bars unnecessarily. Similarly, out-of-home care and disengagement from the education system are significant pathways into the criminal juvenile justice system,” Ms Wright said.

The inclusion of target areas on justice, out-of-home care and housing is long overdue and welcome, as is government consultation with First Nations organisations, according to Ms Wright.

The announcement today is at risk of appearing hollow without substantial funding and in the wake of the dismissal of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the delay on raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and the failure by the Commonwealth Government to even respond to the Australian Law Reform Commission’s *Pathways to Justice* report.

The Law Council notes that the responsibility for the justice targets, in practical terms, will fall mainly on the State Governments, and encourages all State Governments to be ambitious in their reforms and to develop their implementation plans for the justice targets in partnership with Aboriginal communities and community-controlled organisations.

“The National agreement released today contains no real targets on family violence or disability.”

“While the Law Council understands that a specific family violence target is under consideration, we urge governments to consider evidence from the Royal Commission into Violence Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability, together with information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that First Nations people with disabilities face significant barriers not least because of a lack of culturally appropriate disability services.”

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